Postal Regn No. SSRM/KOL RMS/WB/RNP-16/31-12-2025 | RNI Regn No. 2785/1965
Printed on 31-01-2025

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The Herald

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The Herald Vol. CLXI No. 04 Kolkata | Jan 31- Feb 6, 2025 ₹ 10/-

Pope's Message for World Day of the Sick: Hope strengthens us in times of trial

By Christopher Wells

In his Message for the 33rd World Day of the Sick, Pope Francis says God remains close to those who suffer, through encounter, gift, and sharing. Meanwhile, the solemn celebration of the World Day, which normally takes place every three years, is postponed until 2026.

In his Message for the 33rd World Day of the Sick, Pope Francis grapples with the profound questions that confront those who are suffering and those who care for them. "How can we be strong when our bodies are prey to severe, debilitating illnesses that require costly treatment that we may not be able to afford? How can we show strength when, in addition to our own sufferings, we see those of our loved ones who support us yet feel powerless to help us?"

Although true hope "does not disappoint" and in fact "strengthens us in times of trial," this confidence can often prove perplexing in real situations of suffering. "In these situations," the Pope says, we sense our need for a strength greater than our own. We realize that we need God's help, His grace, His Providence, and the strength that is the gift of His Spirit."

The Holy Father goes on to invite the faithful to reflect on three particular ways God remains close to those who are suffering: "encounter, gift, and sharing."

Encounter

The Pope recalls that when Jesus sent the 72 disciples on mission, He told them to tell the sick, "The Kingdom of God has come near to you," that is, "to help the sick see their infirmity… as an opportunity to encounter the Lord."

This encounter, he explains, can be transformative, helping us to discover "a solid rock to which we can cling amid the tempests of life, an experience that… makes us all the stronger because it teaches us that we are not alone."

Gift

This leads us to experience God's closeness in our suffering as a gift, the Pope continues. "More than anything else, suffering makes us aware that hope comes from the Lord. It is thus, first and foremost, a gift to be received and cultivated, by remaining 'faithful to the faithfulness of God'."

The Pope goes on to explain that "only in Christ's resurrection does our own life and destiny find its place within the infinite horizon of eternity." The "great hope" that nothing can separate us from Christ "is the source of all those small glimmers of light that help us to see our way through the trials and obstacles of life," Pope Francis explains, quoting his predecessor, Benedict XVI.

Sharing

Finally, God is close to us through sharing, which is often seen in places of suffering. "How often, at the bedside of the sick, do we learn to hope!" he writes. "How often, by our closeness to those who suffer, do we learn to have faith! How often, when we care for those in need, do we discover love!"

The Pope emphasizes the need "to learn how to appreciate the beauty and significance of these grace-filled encounters" between patients, doctors, caregivers, family and friends. "All these are rays of light to be treasured; even among the dark night of adversity, they give us strength, while at the same time teaching us the deeper meaning of life, in love and closeness."

An important role in the Jubilee

Pope Francis concludes his Message with a special word for those who are sick and suffering, reminding them that they have an "especially important" part to play in the Jubilee. "Your journey together is a sign of hope for everyone, 'a hymn of dignity, a song of hope'."

And he thanks them for their witness, in the name of the whole Church and in his own name, assuring them that they are always in his prayers, and extending to them his blessing.

World Day of the Sick 2025

The World Day of the Sick is observed each year on February 11, the liturgical commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes, with an especially solemn celebration taking place every three years at a Marian shrine.

However, in view of the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis has chosen to delay for one year the solemn celebration that would normally occur in 2025. The solemn commemoration of the World Day of the Sick will now take place in 2026, at the Marian Sanctuary of the Virgin of Chapi of Arequipa in Peru.

The Pope's decision was announced in a press release published on Monday morning by the Dicasteries for the Promotion of Integral Human Development and of Evangelization. The statement noted that for the Jubilee Year, the World Day of the Sick will be celebrated in the ordinary manner at the diocesan level, as usual on February 11; while at the same time noting the upcoming Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers, set for April 5-6; and the Jubilee of People with Disabilities on April 28-29.

Indian Bishops Pray for the Victims of Maha Kumbh Mela Tragedy

Bhubaneswar: The Catholic Bishops of India, gathered for the 36th Plenary Assembly of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI), offered prayers and Holy Mass for the souls of those who lost their lives in the tragic stampede at the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. Special prayers were also said for the grieving families of the victims, expressing solidarity with those affected by the disaster.

The Maha Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, witnessed a devastating stampede that claimed the lives of more than 30 pilgrims. The CCBI conveyed its profound sorrow over the incident and extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

His Eminence Filipe Cardinal Neri Ferrão, President of the CCBI, expressed deep distress over the tragedy. "It is heart-breaking to witness such a calamity during a sacred event that draws millions in devotion. In this time of mourning, we, the Bishops of India, unite in prayer for the departed souls and their loved ones. May God grant strength to the grieving families, healing to the injured and eternal peace to those who have passed away."

As India observed Martyrs' Day, commemorating the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Bishops gathered around the Gandhi statue on the campus of XIM University. In a solemn tribute, His Excellency Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal, and Cardinal Filipe Neri Ferrão together garlanded the statue, paying homage to the Father of the Nation. The assembly observed a moment of silence, offering prayers for global peace and national unity.

The Holy Eucharist of the day was presided over by Cardinal Anthony Poola of Hyderabad. In his homily, he emphasized the need for collective efforts in fulfilling the Church's mission. He encouraged the faithful to walk together in unity, guided by faith in Christ and the light of the Holy Spirit.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara
Deputy Secretary General, CCBI

Pope's Prayer Intentions for February 2025

For vocations to the priesthood and religious life

Let us pray that the ecclesial community might welcome the desires and doubts of those young people who feel a call to serve Christ's mission in the priesthood and religious life.

The Herald
Vol.161 (CLXI) No. 04
Kolkata Jan 31- Feb 6, 2025
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-- Editor

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All material may be edited for the sake of space, clarity or editorial policy. Features, articles should not exceed 600 words, while reports should be within 300 words.

All submission should be made through email. Reports should accompany appropriate photographs. Deadline to submit articles is Sunday, for reports Monday evening, and for advertisements Tuesday 12 noon.

- Editor

Indian state's minority schools fight for right to appoint staff

An amendment stripped minorities' rights and empowered a state agency to select staff, purportedly for transparency.

Religious and linguistic minorities in western Indian Gujarat are upset after the state High Court dismissed a bunch of petitions challenging a law that stripped their right to appoint staff in their state-aided schools.

The Gujarat High Court, the state's top court, dismissed "all the writ petitions" before it that challenged the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (Amendment) Act, 2021, on Jan. 23.

The petitioners challenged amendments to the five-decade-old law, saying they violated the constitutional right of minorities to administer their educational institutions.

The amendment empowered the state's education board to establish qualifications and a selection method for recruiting teaching and non-teaching staff in state-funded private schools, including those managed by minority communities.

"This amendment took away our right to appointment staff of our choice in our schools," said Father Telesphoro Fernandes, secretary of Gujarat Education Board of Catholic Institutions.

Father Fernandes told UCA News on Jan. 24 that the Indian constitution guarantees religious and linguistic minorities the right to establish and manage educational institutions to protect their communities' academic interests.

The amendment violates minorities' constitutional rights, he said.

The state government, run by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), defended the amendment, saying it makes the process "fair, transparent, and merit-based," which it said was not the case before.

Until the amendment, school managers appointed the staff of their choice without any government scrutiny and forwarded their names to the government for paying salaries.

Father Fernandes said the schools "definitely choose people who understand our ethos and values. That does not mean we appoint unqualified persons."

"We will now challenge the High Court order in Supreme Court," the top court in the country, said the priest, who spoke for some 100 Catholic schools in the state. He said some 65 of these schools are state-funded.

The state pays salaries to staff in the state-aided minority-run schools besides paying for annual maintenance.

Although a Christian school took the lead in challenging the amendment in the court, other religious minorities, such as Muslim, Sikh, and linguistic minorities, joined the petition as affected parties of the amendment. **(UCANews)**

"To love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless."

—Gilbert K. Chesterton

Cardinal Oswald Urges Bishops to Work Efficiently to Bear Fruit for the Church in India

Bhubaneswar, January 29, 2025 (CCBI): Oswald Cardinal Gracias, Archbishop Emeritus of Bombay and the Coordinator of the Synod Study Group, which is entrusted with the task of looking into the functions of the Apostolic Nunciatures has called upon the Bishops of India to work with efficiency, dedication and a strong sense of mission to ensure that the Church continues to bear lasting fruit in the country.

Cardinal Oswald emphasized the need for proactive leadership, collaboration and unwavering commitment to the Gospel's values. He was giving the homily during the Holy Mass on the second day of the 36th Plenary Assembly of the CCBI on January 29, 2025 at the XIM University, Bhubaneswar.

The Cardinal acknowledged the growing challenges posed by unfriendly legislation that affects the Church's mission, institutions and outreach programmes. Despite these challenges, he stressed that efficiency,

transparency, and commitment to the people will help the Church navigate through these difficult times and continue its mission.

On the second day of the 36th Plenary Assembly of the CCBI, the bishops participated actively in spiritual conversation, a deeply reflective method of discernment that enables them to listen attentively to the voice of God and make decisions rooted in divine wisdom. This process fosters a spirit of prayerful listening, mutual sharing and collective discernment, ensuring that the Church's mission remains aligned with the will of God.

The 204 bishops, present at the assembly, were divided into 16 groups, where they engaged in elaborate discussions to identify and finetune the ten key priorities for the Church in India. These priorities were not decided in isolation but emerged from an extensive consultation process involving laity, religious, priests and bishops, reflecting the collective aspirations and concerns of the entire faith community in the country.

To enhance the depth of their discernment, the bishops spent dedicated time in silence, prayer and Eucharistic adoration, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This sacred time of reflection allowed them to detach themselves from external distractions and to focus entirely on God's plan for the Church's future.

By Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara, Deputy Secretary General, CCBI

Growing Intolerence against Christians

Christians being treated like they do not belong to this country, says office bearer of United Christian Forum.

Indian Christians face an existential threat if the government fails to act immediately to stop the spiralling incidents of hate crimes, says an ecumenical Christian group. Incidents of anti-Christian violence rose steeply from 127 in 2014 to 834 in 2024, revealed the latest report released by the United Christian Forum (UCF) on Jan. 24.

"If the trend is not stopped immediately by political will and concerted government action, it will threaten the identity and existence of the Indian Christian community in their motherland," the New Delhi-based body of several Christian denominations said in a statement.

A C Michael, a UCF office-bearer, said practising the Christian faith in the country is going to be a challenging task unless the government reins in the right-wing Hindu groups.

Michael, a former member of the Delhi state's minority commission, said that the Church's charitable works were falsely portrayed as "a facade for religious conversion through false narratives" by the right-wing organizations.Michael Williams, president of UCF, said the attacks against the community have become "more frequent, brutal, and systematic."

UCANews

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Pope to Catholic communicators: 'Tell stories that nourish hope'

By Lisa Zengarini

Pope Francis encourages Catholic journalists and communicators gathered in Rome for the Jubilee of the World of Communication to be courageous truth and hope-tellers in our world marred by conflicts, division and misinformation.

As Catholic communicators from across the world convened to Rome for the Jubilee of the World of Communication this weekend, Pope Fracis urged them to approach their work with courage, integrity, and a steadfast focus on hope, liberating “the inner strength of the heart.“ “Let your storytelling be hope-telling", the Pope said in prepared remarks he addressed on Saturday to the communicators gathered in the Paul VI Hall.

Appeal for the release of detained journalists

Pope Francis began his address by expressing his deep gratitude to them, acknowledging the many journalists who risk their lives to uncover the truth, particularly in conflict zones.

While honouring those killed, the Pope appealed for the release of those who have been imprisoned “simply for being faithful to their profession.” Noting that the freedom of journalists is essential for the freedom of all citizens he emphasized that "free, responsible, and accurate information is a treasure of knowledge, experience, and virtue that must be preserved and promoted.”

“Free, responsible, and accurate information is a treasure of knowledge, experience, and virtue that must be preserved and promoted. Without it, we risk no longer distinguishing truth from falsehood; without it, we expose ourselves to growing prejudices and polarizations that destroy the bonds of civil coexistence and prevent us from rebuilding fraternity.”

A vocation and a mission

Describing journalism as a vocation and a mission, Pope went on to remark that communicators have a “unique”responsibility that extends beyond the mere reporting of facts. How information is conveyed matters greatly making adifference “between a communication that rekindles hope, builds bridges, opens doors, and a communication that increases divisions, polarizations, and oversimplifications of reality.”

“A good communication, he continued, requires “study and reflection, the ability to see and listen; to stand with the marginalized, those unseen and unheard, and to rekindle—in the hearts of those who read, listen, or watch you—a sense of good and evil and a longing for the good you recount and bear witness to.”

Courage

Central to Pope Francis' reflection was courage in the pursuit of truth and positive transformation. Recalling the Latin etymology of the word which is “to have heart," he reiterated the call he has repeatedly addressed to communicators in his Messages for the World Communications Days, including this year, “to listen with the heart, to speak with the heart, to guard the wisdom of the heart and to share the hope of the heart.”

Promoting critical thinking to combat the "brain rot" caused by social media

Pope Francis therefore urged the audience to use this Jubilee year as an opportunity to “free the heart from what corrupts it”, using communication to inspire goodness and positive change. Addressing modern challenges like social media addiction which "rots" minds, he again advocated for media literacy and critical thinking to combat superficial consumption of information. The Pope called for collaborative efforts from media professionals, educators, and innovators to ensure communication serves the common good.

Storytelling and hope-telling

Drawing on the example of the Conversion of Paul, he reminded Catholic communicators of their power to ignite positive change through truthful storytelling. “Stories reveal our being part of a living fabric, the intertwining threads that connect us to one another,” he said.

“Not all stories are good, yet they must be told. Evil must be seen to be redeemed, but it must be told well, so as not to wear down the fragile threads of coexistence.”

Indian cardinal to lead Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue

By Cindy Wooden

Pope Francis has named Indian Cardinal George J. Koovakad to be the new prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

The 51-year-old, who received his red hat from the pope in December, also will continue to be responsible for organizing papal trips abroad, Vatican News reported Jan. 24, the day his appointment was announced.

The dicastery is responsible for dialogue with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and members of other world religions.

"The Dicastery works to ensure that dialogue with the followers of other religions takes place in an appropriate way, with an attitude of listening, esteem and respect," according to the apostolic constitution governing the Roman Curia.

The dicastery "fosters various kinds of relations with them so that, through the contribution of all, peace, freedom, social justice, the protection and safeguarding of creation, and spiritual and moral values may be promoted," the constitution says.

Cardinal Koovakad succeeds Spanish Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot who died in November after dedicating his priestly life and ministry to building bridges between Catholics and Muslims.

In an interview with Vatican News Jan. 24, Cardinal Koovakad said he was a bit nervous taking over at the dicastery, but "I rely heavily on the prayers of all those who continue to dream of a world where religious differences not only coexist peacefully but become essential elements in building peace among peoples."

A Syro-Malabar Catholic and career Vatican diplomat, Cardinal Koovakad has experience living, working and ministering in countries where Catholics are a minority and interreligious dialogue is an accepted fact of life.

Born in Chethipuzha in India's southern Kerala state Aug. 11, 1973, he was ordained a priest of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Archeparchy of Changanacherry in 2004.

He earned a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome in 2006 and joined the Holy See's diplomatic service that same year. He worked in Vatican nunciatures in Algeria, South Korea, Iran, Costa Rica and Venezuela.

"I was born and raised in a multicultural and multi religious society where all religions are respected and harmony is preserved," he told Vatican News. **"Diversity is a richness!"**

"Christians are called to be seeds of fraternity for all," he said. "This does not mean giving up one's identity but rather being aware that identity should never be a reason to build walls or discriminate against others. Instead, it should always be an opportunity to build bridges."

In 2020, Cardinal Koovakad began working in the General Affairs Section of the Vatican Secretariat of State. He joined Pope Francis on his trip to Greece and Cyprus in December 2021 and has been organizing the pope's foreign trips since then.

In that role, he has coordinated a dozen papal trips, including several where interreligious dialogue was a main feature, including trips to Kazakhstan, Bahrain, Mongolia and the pope's trip in September to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore the longest trip of Pope Francis' pontificate.

(UCA News)

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The Herald
Vol. 161 (CLXI) No.04 • KOLKATA Jan 31 - Feb 6, 2025

The Indian Constitution at 75:
A Testament to Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity

Seventy-five years ago, in the grand halls of deliberation, a diverse assembly of visionaries came together with a singular purpose—to craft a document that would shape the destiny of a newly independent nation. The making of the Indian Constitution was not merely a legal exercise; it was an act of immense foresight, wisdom, and dedication to the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, fraternity and democracy. Today, as we mark the 75th anniversary of this remarkable achievement, it is imperative to reflect upon the sheer brilliance of this document and its enduring relevance.

The Indian Constitution is often hailed as one of the finest in the world, and rightly so. Unlike many nations that inherited rigid legal structures, India, under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the Constituent Assembly, created a living document that balanced tradition with modernity. It drew inspiration from the best global practices, integrating elements from the British parliamentary system, the American Bill of Rights, and the Directive Principles akin to Irish ideals. Yet, it remained uniquely Indian, deeply rooted in the values of pluralism, secularism, and social justice.

The Constituent Assembly, composed of stalwarts such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, and Maulana Azad, engaged in meticulous debates, ensuring that the Constitution would not be a mere reflection of the past but a roadmap for the future. Every word, every clause was scrutinized, discussed, and shaped to uphold the aspirations of a people who had endured colonial rule and sought a future of dignity and self-governance.

At the heart of the Constitution lies its commitment to justice—social, economic, and political. The abolition of untouchability, the emphasis on fundamental rights, and the directive principles of state policy all stood as pillars of a progressive and inclusive India. The visionaries knew that political independence alone would not suffice; the people needed safeguards against discrimination, poverty, and injustice.

Seventy-five years later, the Indian Constitution remains as relevant as ever. It has withstood wars, political upheavals, economic transformations, and global crises, emerging stronger each time. Its flexibility, ensured by the amendment process, has allowed it to evolve with the changing needs of the nation while safeguarding its core principles.

Yet, as we celebrate this milestone, we must also recognize our responsibility. A Constitution is only as strong as the people who uphold it. Challenges to its spirit—be it in the form of communalism, erosion of civil liberties, or the dilution of democratic institutions must be met with unwavering resolve. The framers of our Constitution envisioned an India where justice and liberty reign supreme, and it is upon us to honour that vision.

As we commemorate 75 years of this monumental achievement, let us reaffirm our faith in the ideals of our Constitution. Let us remember that this document is not just a legal framework but a sacred covenant—a promise of unity in diversity, of progress with equity, and of freedom with responsibility. The Indian Constitution is not just the best in the world because of its text; it is the best because of the people who strive to uphold its essence.

Letters to the Editor

On the Splendour of the Humanities: a cautionary note for our children

Sir, We in India are falling prey to the credential fetishes of science and commerce. This is at the expense of the arts --- if we fail to train our children in the splendor of the humanities; then as Faith communities we cannot move together, in harmony and agape. Children are to be protected from predatorial coaching centres which rob kids of their innocence forcing them to labour like slaves for what passes of as science in our country. Science is beautiful if taught and done right, according to the inclination of the student. But science forced down the gullets of children in the form of formulae and other matters of rote learning is to be resisted at all costs.

Our nation needs historians; litterateurs and philosophers. I cannot imagine someone of the calibre of Karl Rahner arising from among us in our zeitgeist. Hindu philosophy has been stagnant for an exceptionally long time. This is because degrees, even Ph.D.s in philosophy do not philosophers make. The state of Sanskrit is abysmal --- the last Sanskrit to English dictionary was exhaustively done Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819-1899). All other Sanskrit dictionaries are derivatives of that original dictionary. Christian Studies in India is heavily based on what theologians of now developed nations have said. The reason why we do not have contemporary Christian and Hindu theologians of impeccable reputation is because we do not encourage our best students to study the humanities from Plus Two. Thus, we often have students who go on to become teachers of the humanities and the social sciences simply because they had nothing better to study. We have specialised study-hubs for the sciences like the IITs, but we do not have centres of excellence for philosophy, theology and the humanities open to the public. Thus, we need to emphasise in students the need to study the arts from an early age and as a nation we need to stop valorising mathematical prowess at the cost of every other subject.

Parroting the core beliefs of deconstruction, materialist dialectics and other passing fads are not signs of scholarship. Even being Heads of Post Graduate Departments, is of little use unless we learn to critique concepts which within the social sciences and literature; are never written on stone. Now that AI has arrived we urgently need a pool of humanities scholars who are women and men of Faith. By Faith I mean a distinctly Indian Faith in our respective religions, who can resist the inhumanity of Newtonian mechanics so abhorred by William Blake. Blake, of course, is one of the greatest poets of all times. We are humans with autonomy, we are not subject to Newton's laws of mechanics.

How many children, Hindu or Catholic, have been exposed to the Journals of Thomas Merton? How many children have been exposed to the works of Thich Nath Hanh? How many children have ever seen the Upanishads, or for that matter, the Jerusalem Bible in their school libraries? When I was a wee little boy, I was fortunate enough that the Christian Brothers had opened their personal library for me. But for the late Br. Robert Cataldus Whiting cfc; Br. Jus Harrison cfc and Br. Jerome Kelly cfc I would have remained an equivalent of an urban zombie. And, I had the good fortune to be tutored one on one by the Irish nonagenarian Br. Maurice Baptist Finn cfc who built the Regina Mundi school from scratch. These Brothers including Br. Lenny Lobo, whom I knew as a kid, opened the doors of the humanities for me. Otherwise, I too would have thought that studying science or commerce was the summum bonum of one's life. No wonder that the interior life is being discarded by students grounded in empirical quantitative methods for all that jazz we make out of the nouveau riche who come to their riches without realising they are just tech-coolies at the mercy of developed nations. We forget how important schooling is. Br. Whiting cfc, my first Guru, was an Australian mathematical genius who also topped BHU in Indian History.

Yours truly,
Dr. Subhasis Chattopadhyay

One evening an old Cherokee Indian told his grandson about a "battle" that goes on inside people.
He said, "My son, the battle is between two 'wolves' inside us all.
One is Evil. It is angry, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.
The other is Good. Is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."
The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"
The old Cherokee simply replied, "**The one you feed.**"

Liturgy

MY FAVOURITE SAINT

Saint of the Day for Jan. 31

Saint John Bosco

John Bosco's theory of education could well be used in today's schools. It was a preventive system, rejecting corporal punishment and placing students in surroundings removed from the likelihood of committing sin. He advocated frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion. He combined catechetical training and fatherly guidance, seeking to unite the spiritual life with one's work, study and play.

Encouraged during his youth in Turin to become a priest so he could work with young boys, John was ordained in 1841. His service to young people started when he met a poor orphan in Turin, and instructed him in preparation for receiving Holy Communion. He then gathered young apprentices and taught them catechism.

After serving as chaplain in a hospice for working girls, Don Bosco opened the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for boys. Several wealthy and powerful patrons contributed money, enabling him to provide two workshops for the boys, shoemaking and tailoring.

By 1856, the institution had grown to 150 boys and had added a printing press for publication of religious and catechetical pamphlets. John's interest in vocational education and publishing justify him as patron of young apprentices and Catholic publishers.

John's preaching fame spread and by 1850 he had trained his own helpers because of difficulties in retaining young priests. In 1854, he and his followers informally banded together, inspired by Saint Francis de Sales.

With Pope Pius IX's encouragement, John gathered 17 men and founded the Salesians in 1859. Their activity concentrated on education and mission work. Later, he organized a group of Salesian Sisters to assist girls.

John Bosco educated the whole person—body and soul united. He believed that Christ's love and our faith in that love should pervade everything we do—work, study, play. For John Bosco, being a Christian was a full-time effort, not a once-a-week, Mass-on-Sunday experience. It is searching and finding God and Jesus in everything we do, letting their love lead us.

Yet, because John realized the importance of job-training and the self-worth and pride that come with talent and ability, he trained his students in the trade crafts, too.

Saint John Bosco is a Patron Saint of Boys, Editors, Educators, Teachers and Youth.

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

By Fr Mark Skelton

Feast of the
Presentation of the
Lord.
Anna and Simeon
He stumbles, as an
old man might
who finds his
answered prayer has
come.
But unexpectedly, he finds
a baby is the ans'ring one.
She, who has waited long in grief,
a widow, decades on her own.
Now finds she dances, full of joy,
and shares with all what she's been
shown.
They saw the baby king, and smiled
at what this coming signifies.
They are the ones who understand,
who see, whom God did not surprise
The Feast of the Presentation
A peasant girl, new mother, lost and
tired,
walks quietly in amidst the crowd, the
noise.
Bears one small taper, with its tiny
flame,
unnoticed by the
ones who gather
close.
One breeze could
end the light before it
shines
but husband hand,
worn hard by
hammer blow,
Though rough,
shields gently with a fost'ring love,
and hopes to see this light develop,
grow.
Two figures move from shadow to the
light.
One knows he now can lay his burden
down.
His waiting over, he has seen the hope
which will repel the darkness, light the
throne.
The other; ancient woman, full of
prayer,
whose decades wait has drawn her to
this place;
finds movement pulsing in her creaking
limbs,
her song renewed, this light floods
worlds with grace.

Sunday Reflections

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord [C] - Sunday February 2, 2025
(Mal 3:14; Ps 24; Heb 2:14-18; Gospel Lk 2:22-40)

The context: Today's Gospel presents the head of the Holy Family, Joseph, faithfully obeying God's law given through Moses concerning the purification of the mother and the redeeming of the child, by presenting Mary and the Baby Jesus in the Temple. The events recounted appear elsewhere in the liturgical year but are those we traditionally celebrate today, February 2nd, with the Feast of Presentation of Jesus. The creche at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is left in place until today, marking the end of Christmas season.

Homily starter anecdote: The Story of the Presentation of the Lord: At the end of the fourth century, a woman named Etheria made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Her journal, discovered in 1887, gives an unprecedented glimpse of liturgical life there. Among the celebrations she describes is the Epiphany, the observance of Christ's birth, and the gala procession in honor of his Presentation in the Temple 40 days later. Under the Mosaic Law, a woman was ritually "unclean" for 40 days after childbirth, when she was to present herself to the priests and offer sacrifice—her "purification." Contact with anyone who had brushed against mystery—birth or death—excluded a person from Jewish worship. This feast emphasizes Jesus' first appearance in the Temple more than Mary's purification. The observance spread throughout the Western Church in the fifth and sixth centuries. Because the Church in the West celebrated Jesus' birth on December 25, the Presentation was moved to February 2, 40 days after Christmas. At the beginning of the eighth century, Pope Sergius inaugurated a candlelight procession; at the end of the same century the blessing and distribution of candles which continues to this day became part of the celebration, giving the feast its popular name: (Candlemas Day).

The feast: This is a combined feast, commemorating the Jewish practice of the purification of the mother after childbirth and the presentation of the child in the Temple. Pope Benedict XVI affirms that "Jesus enters the ancient temple; he who is the new Temple of God." In 1997, Pope John Paul II designated the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord as the Annual World Day of Consecrated Life. In his homily, Pope Benedict XVI expressly referred to this intention of his predecessor. So, we invite all our consecrated women and men to return to the beginning, to the very personal early days of the gift of your vocation, recalling, for a moment, the first time you sensed the Lord's call to you to follow Him with an undivided heart.

This Feast Day is known under four names:

1) The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (by prayers and the payment of "five shekels to a member of the priestly family" (Nm 3:47-48; NAB Note on Lk 2:22), to redeem or buy the firstborn male child back from the Lord's service).

2) The Hypanthe feast or Feast of the Purification of Mary (by the offering two pigeons in the Temple).

3) The Feast of Encounter (because the New Testament, represented by the Baby Jesus, encountered the Old Testament, represented by the Holy Spirit's aged, holy witnesses, Simeon and Anna). On February 2nd, we celebrate these events as a formal ending of the Christmas season. In a sense, this feast celebrates the meeting point of the two "Testaments" for Catholic-Christians: the old and new. Jesus, who is the new Temple of God, enters the ancient temple. Jesus, who ushers in the law of love, comes to visit his people in a place in which the law of sacrifice was fulfilled, thus, bringing to fulfilment obedience to the Law and ushering in the last times of salvation (Pope Benedict XVI).

4) The Feast of Candlemas. This feast is also known as Candlemas because of the tradition of blessing and distributing candles and holding a candlelight procession on this day. These practices are drawn from Simeon's words in the gospel for this feast, in which he prophesies that the child Jesus will become "a light for revelation to the Gentiles."

Redemption and Post-childbirth Purification ceremonies: The Mosaic Law taught that, since every Jewish male child belonged to Yahweh, the parents had to "buy back" the child ("redeem" him), (The "Pidyon haBen" Service) with the payment of "five shekels (ă15 Denariusă wage for 15 days of work) to a member of the priestly family" (Nm 3:47-48; NAB Note on Lk 2:22). In addition, (Nm 18:15) every mother had to be purified after childbirth by prayers and the sacrificeof alamb (or two turtledoves for the poor) in the Temple. Joseph kept these laws as an act of obedience to God.

– Fr. Anthony Kadavil

BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY DAY
Series No -9
Celebration in Serampore

By Alma Dung Dung

The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Church, Serampore, celebrated the 5th Anniversary of the BEC Day with the theme Hope and Women Empowerment on 17th November 2024.Sister Rasmi, BEC Co-Coordinator from Archbishop's House, Mrs. Manju Linda Howrah/ Hooghly Deanery Co-Ordinator, and Manju Kerketta DST member, guided this Annual Day celebration.

All the three units - St. Anthony, St. Mother Teresa, and St. Alphonsa of BEC members gathered at the Sisters Convent called Shanti Rani Home and began the Bible procession. All joined in the procession holding banners, praying the Rosary and singing hymns and moving towards the Church. The Aarti was done to the Bible at the Church gate. The Solemn Holy Eucharist began, during the entrance hymn, The Bible was enthroned at the altar by Fr. Saroj Mullick (SDB) from Bandel who was the main celebrant of the day and Fr. Sujay Sardar S.C.C., our Parish Priest was the con-celebrant. Mrs. Alma Dung Dung the Parish co-ordinator gave the introduction in the beginning of the Mass. During homily, Fr. Saroj specifically told how to spread the Word of God to families first, then to neighbours and to parishioners.

After the Holy Mass a cultural programme was held like Action Song, Dance and a Bible Quiz. The yearly report was read by Papiya Mukherjee. Lunch was served to all parishioners, Cheshire Home members, and all the guests who came from Santragachi and Chandanagar.

2024 Action Plan

St. Alphonsa Unit- reported having online quiz contest and prize distribution, retreat at Chopra, feeding the poor from Cheshire Home, donating a St. Alphonso Statue to the Church, praying for the Sick people, having Divine Mercy devotion at 3pm and giving ration to 5 Hindu families.

St. Anthony Unit- gave plastic sheets to poor families, necessary things to a child who went to a boarding, money to a sick family and prayed for them. Whenever there are events in the church, all the three units join together to work for them to make them a success.

Annual Meeting of the Diocesan Priests 2025 at Proggaloy

By Fr. Gnana Peppin

The Annual Meeting of the Priests of the Archdiocese of Calcutta was held at Diocesan Pastoral Center at Proggaloy, Barasat from 21-24 January 2025. Welcoming the Priests, Archbishop Thomas D'Souza, the Archbishop of Calcutta pointed out the events that are shaping the church in recent time. They are Synod on Synodality and the Jubilee 2025. He said, "Now is the time for Listening to one another, evaluate our ministry as to see where we stand and called to be builders of communities of persons." He insisted that accountability and transparency in our ministry and to work for priestly vocations are major concerns of the Archdiocese.

Fr. Charles Leon, the Secretary of CCBI Commission for VSCR (Vocation, Seminarians, Clergy and Religious) from Trivandrum Archdiocese was the resource person who inspired the clergy to "think of our vows as an opportunity to serve God's people and not merely as a challenge." We need to have the correct identity of ourselves. He said, "If you do not know where you come from, you will not know where you are heading." He helped the priests to make a road map of their priestly ministry by asking, "How could your pastoral engagement be significantly different in the next five years, from what it is now." This was done through a three tier analysis: Context –Challenges – Concretization.

He also shared about the qualities of Servant Leadership: Accompaniment, Capable of influen-cing people, Expressing emotions appropriately, Walking the way and walking another way when needed. There are also different leadership styles and use of power differently. Power and Care must have positive influence in our ministry. There were other concerns pertaining to the life and ministry of the diocesan clergy raised and discussed. The silver Jubilarians Fr. Barnabas Soren and Fr.Philip D'Souza were felicitated for their 25 years of committed service to the Archdiocese.

News & Views

My Life, My Priesthood

By Francis Sunil Rosario

I thank God for the gift of life. I consider my 75th birthday as a milestone stage in my life's journey. My call to serve God in humanity and through my priesthood, gave me real joy and contentment. The years have been fascinating and exciting for me. I feel, as if it was just the other day I was ordained to be a priest, on April 21, 1979. I wonder how quickly these 46 years have gone by in the service of God and through my various ministries in the Archdiocese of Calcutta.

I am immensely happy that I have opportunity to celebrate this Jubilee year 2025, with a theme 'Pilgrims of Hope'. I make a reflection of my life on my milestone stage of life and my renewed journey into priesthood at the dusk of life.

Some of the dreams, hopes and aspirations I had, still remains unfulfilled. I have realised that this life is short and there is so much to do to make realise God's Kingdom through my commitment, service to the faithful and my ministry 'Ad Extra', by reaching out to people of other faith and other denominations, reaching out to the migrants and displaced people. It's all in process, as if the 'creation is groaning' and my life is within my hopes, aspirations and dreams to accomplish God's plan and design God has offered me, to be a part in the process.

I am inspired to read the editorial in "Vidyajyoti", January 2025 by Dr. Vlan C. Anthony S.J. It is very powerful and it touched my soul deeply to understand my commitment as priest in the context of today's world scenario. My priesthood is a call to my prophetic mission, as God called Prophet Ezekiel to speak to the dry bones. Prophet Ezekiel was called to fulfil God's plan. He was told by God, " Our hopes are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off." (Ezekiel 37: 1-14). It sounded depressing, disheartening, dispiriting and demoralizing.. Ezekiel is in this valley of dry bones and the 'hope' is lost... but the hand of God is on him (Ezek 37:1-3) and the spirit of God is leading him. So also, within my own priestly journey, I have experienced 'dry bones' due to structural sins, prevailing within the system and my own weaknesses, my vulnerabilities. God's call to redeem this system by my total surrender and commitment to the cause is urgent and challenging.

'The turn of the year 2025 brings with it, a mire of sadness and serenity, helplessness and hope. There is a certain insecurity with many surprises and shocks, blessings and burdens. The war-torn West Asia, Russia – Ukraine crisis and the global climate issues, in the milieu of the ethnic rivalry and killing, fake news, religious persecution, financial meltdown, lack of transparency in dealings, blatant lies pushed down as truths, and the perilous plunge into the divisive polarization here in India and at our end.' It's all within the system. Stories of discriminations, injustices, insult, pain and pathos, suffering and sorrow are in numerous.

Michael Buckley, Professor Emeritus of Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, California, in an article titled, "Am I weak enough to be a priest?" captures this:

"A body that was broken for us. A blood that was shed for us. He (Jesus) understands himself as a sacrificed self, effective only passing through his destruction, giving life and freedom only because he himself has moved through death and terror and achieved new life."

Apostle Paul saw his pain, suffering, weakness as being transformed through the supporting power of Christ: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness that the power of God may rest upon me;....for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:9, 10). This is our hope in which: we were saved" (Rom 8:24). Such hope is grounded in God's integrity, character, and promise.

During my years of priesthood, I came across a poet, a composer and a singer, Leonard Cohen, the Jewish-Canadian poet and singer. His albums have inspired me. His deep throated voice takes me to the marrow of my bones. He is so real through his own painful journey of life. In his song "Anthem," of the 1992 album The Future declares:

"Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in."

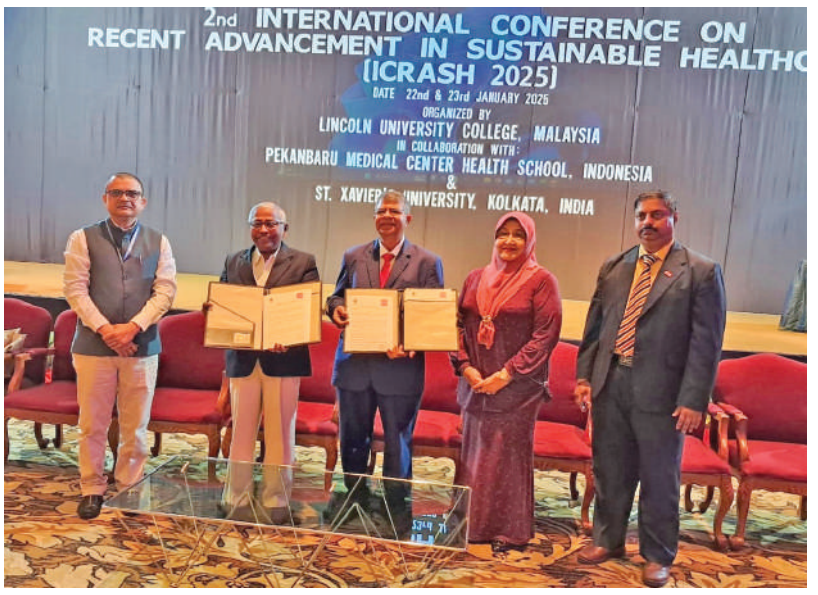
These lines resonate with Prophet Isaiah, who gave hope to people through his prophetic message:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light shining on them. You have given them great joy." (Is. 9:2-3)

We all go through 'darkness' and 'cracks' in life. We are tested by fire and those moments of 'darkness' or 'cracks' are the opportunities to allow the light to enter within, that enlightens us.

"There is a crack in everything." Yes. The cracks in our social and political, economic and ecological, cultural and religious, national and international systems and realms are more than apparent. That our lives don't turn out the way we want them to, and in the process reveal the cracks present is obvious. Paradoxically, however, sometimes they offer us solutions we hadn't thought about before. "That's how the light gets in," to quote Cohen.

Today, as I complete 75 years, I can only vouch that God does act in and through life's many ups and downs, many moments or periods of 'darkness' and 'cracks'. Life has been really very fulfilling and leading me towards His great glory. Incarnation affirms this profoundly in a concrete way for me today: Emmanuel (God with us).



SXUK Signs MoU with Lincoln University College (LUC)

Fr. Felix Raj, accompanied by Dr. Indra Kanta Maitra, COE of SXUK, visited Lincoln University College (LUC) in Kuala Lumpur on January 21-22, 2025.

During his visit, he delivered a
lecture at an international conference organised by LUC at the Summit Hotel on "Sustainable Healthcare and Management."

The visit marked a significant milestone as SXUK and LUC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for mutual academic and research collaboration.

Father Felix Raj had a constructive meeting with Prof. Dr. Amiya Bhaumik, Founder and President of Lincoln University College, Malaysia, to discuss mutual cooperation between the institutions. Additionally, he also met with the Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellors of LUC.

Fr. Felix Raj and Dr. Maitra also utilized the opportunity to pay his respects at the historic site in Malacca where St. Francis Xavier was reburied in 1554.

By Staff Reporter

Bible Sunday Celebration at St. Ignatius' Church, Kidderpore

See the report on page 9

Unity Octave

Christian Unity Octave Prayer Service at PRABHU JISUR GIRJA

By Andrea Gomes

The Unity Octave Prayer Service was celebrated on 22nd Jan Wednesday in Prabhu Jisur Girja. The pastors present were Rev Martin Pakhare,CNI (Weslian, St Andrew's,organiser of Easter Sunday Rally), Rev Asis Sarkar (Baptist Mission, Calinga Baptist), Rev Vedha Moorthy (BMS), Rev Asit Ghose (BMS),Rev Suresh Mohan, CNI (Tamil Church,Gol Talao), Fr F Sunil Rosario, Fr Kurian PP, Fr Dipak Gomes, Fr Joe de Souza, Fr John Rojerse, Fr Timir and other pastors and priests.

The Theme was: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, will never die. DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?" (Jn 11/20-27). After the opening salutation by Fr Kurian, Fr Timir introduced the Pastors , Order of Worship, and the Theme. Then Pastor Asis Sarkar spoke on the Importance of Christian Unity Octave. He reminded us about the wish of our Lord that we all be one. He stressed on our praying and witnessing together. Fr Dipak led the Introductory Worship. Fr Timir read out the Passage and focussed on the Theme of the day "DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?" It was a reflection cum meditation, ending with the personal reflection: What is your answer to Jesus today?

Basing on this meditation and our union, Fr Kurian led us into the Penitential Service. The Liturgy of the Word was opened by Rev Suresh Mohan, reading out the Collect. Letter to the Ephesians (4/4-6) was read out by Josephine Piper, "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." The Gospel (John 11/20-27) was proclaimed by Fr Rojerse. The Homily followed by Rev Vedha Moorthy, an inspiring preacher, moving all over India through the year, bringing the Word of the Lord to all people, esp Words of Peace and Harmony in the strife-torn areas. He dwelt on our being disciples in the world of today, witnessing to Love and Concern of Jesus for all, asking for the forgiveness of our sins, our faith in Jesus in good times and in trouble and stressing the example of the children.

The Nicene Creed was recited by all. The Prayer of the Faithful on Unity was opened by Fr Joe and read out by Jeffrey Rodgers.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist was celebrated on the Theme of Unity.

After the Holy Communion, Rev Martin and Rev Asit Ghose shared words of encouragement. Fr Kurian led the Final Prayer and then pronounced the Solemn Blessing while all the Pastors and Priests stretched out their hands over the people. Singing on Unity in English and Bengali was led by Ratan Gomes and Choir. The Prayer Service was composed and directed by Fr Timir.

Why God Allows Pain

A man went to a barbershop to have his hair cut and his beard trimmed. As the barber began to work, they began to have a good conversation. They talked about so many things and various subjects. When they eventually touched on the subject of God, the barber said: "I don't believe that God exists."

"Why do you say that?" asked the customer. "Well, you just have to go out in the street to realize that God doesn't exist. Tell me, if God exists, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children?

If God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can't imagine a loving God who would allow all of these things." The customer thought for a moment, but didn't respond because he didn't want to start an argument.. The barber finished his job and the customer left the shop.

Just after he left the barbershop, he saw a man in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair and an untrimmed beard. He looked dirty and unkempt.. The customer turned back and entered the barbershop again and he said to the barber: "You know what? Barbers do not exist."

"How can you say that?" asked the surprised barber. "I am here, and I am a barber. And I just worked on you!"

"No!" the customer exclaimed. "Barbers don't exist because if they did, there would be no people with dirty long hair and untrimmed beards, like that man outside."

"Ah, but barbers DO exist! That's what happens when people do not come to me."

"Exactly!" affirmed the customer. "That's the point! God, too, DOES exist! That's what happens when people do not go to Him and don't look to Him for help. That's why there's so much pain and suffering in the world."

Kolkata Celebrates Unity Octave

By Staff Reporter

The theme for the 'Unity Octave – 2025' was "Do you believe this?" (John 11: 26). It was in the context of the dialogue between Jesus and Martha when Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany following the death of their brother Lazarus, as narrated by the evangelist John. Keeping in mind, the Jubilee year 2025 theme "Pilgrims of Hope" played as significant context.

The international team appointed jointly by the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (DPCU) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC) finalised the materials for the week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025 at Monastery of Bose, Italy. The meeting was chaired jointly by Rev. Dr. Mikie Roberts of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and Rev. Fr. Martin Browne OSB of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome.

The week of prayer for Christian Unity 2025 offered an invitation to draw on this shared heritage and to enter more deeply in the faith that unites all Christians.

In this 1,700 anniversary year of the Council of Nicaea, the Ecumenical celebration of the Word of God during the week of prayer was centred on the meaning of believing and on the affirmation of faith, both personal and communal, both "I believe" and "We believe." The biblical text from which the theme for the week is drawn, with its challenging question, "Do you believe this?" is proclaimed in a dialogue between readers and the assembly as part of the invitation to worship.

The prayers of intercession, based on patristic writings from the second to the eighth centuries, are a call to grow in faith, and to bear witness to God, Father, Son and Holy spirit together, in the world.

His Grace, Archbishop Thomas D'Souza, appointed Rev. Fr. Basil Mandi, Director, Commission for Ecumenism, CCBI. At his initiative and Archdiocese of Calcutta, Fr. Basil printed the booklets and distributed to all the R.C. Churches of Calcutta Archdiocese. He also sent a letter to Rt. Rev. Poritosh Canning, CNI, Bishop of Calcutta to help identify the CNI churches to hold unity Prayer in those Churches during the Octave. Rev. Martin Pakhare, CNI on behalf of the CNI diocese helped to identify those Churches. Besides, the Baptist Missionary Service (BMS) and the Assembly of God, (AG Church) participated whole-heartedly by bringing faithful to celebrate unity octave on specific days.

This year's Unity Octave events were organised Jointly by R.C. Church, CNI, BMS and AG Church – Kolkata. Accordingly, a team of pastors from R.C., CNI, Baptist Mission and AG Church decided on the eight days prayer in different Churches of Kolkata. Fr. Sunil Rosario, Regional Secretary, Commission for Ecumenism, CCBI was a part of co-ordination body and helped in organising the week's prayer events. Besides, Fr. Basil Mandi and Rev. Pakhare, CNI, Rev. Ashish Sarkar, Rev. Benjamin Francis, BMS CEO, Host Manager Mr. David John for inspirational Music., Rev. Patrick Joseph, Director, A G Church were involved in organising Unity Octave prayers.

The order of worship as designed by WCC and the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (DPCU) were held from Jan. 18-25. On the first day of Unity Octave, the services were conducted very well under the direction of Rev. Benjamin Francis, CEO, BMS. Rev. Peter Dunn, preached a very practical and meaningful sermon at this worship. He represented form Big Life Fellowship, U.K. Fr. Sunil Rosario, R.C. Church introduced the worship, highlighting on the joint efforts of WCC and Dicastery for Promoting Christian unity.

The second day (Jan 19) worship was held at Fatima Shrine, under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Satish Makhal, CSSR. On the third day, it was held at St. Mary's Church, Elgin Road, under the direction of Rev. Biswajit Biswas, CNI. On the fourth day (Jan 22), the prayers were held at Prabhu Jishur Church, under the direction of Rev. Fr. Timir Singha, S.J. The fifth day (Jan 23), the prayers were held at Holy Trinity Church, CNI, Armhest Street, under the direction of Rev. Saikot Nath. On Jan 24, the prayers were held at Assembly of God Church, Park Street, under the direction of Rev. Patrick Joseph and on the final day, the prayers were held at Christ the King Church, Park Circus. It was a grand finale day of the Unity Octave and under the direction of Fr. Basil Mandi and Fr. Sunil Rosario.

On Jan. 25, the final day of Unity Octave, the prayers were incorporated with Indian Bharat Natyam dances and appropriate hymns for unity, peace and joy. A team of dancers from Kalahridya, Nepalganj, under the direction of Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Saju George, S.J. danced to the tune of some of the devotional songs, including Our Father and a Hymn to Holy Spirit. To end the prayer service, they danced on "Anondo Anondo" (Joy Joy..) and a Tarana, purely a classical dance according to Indian classical dance and music traditions. The hymns were conducted by Mr. Dilip Rozario and sung by his Calcutta Choir.

This way, the Churches in Kolkata celebrated Unity Octave prayers during the Jubilee year to build the bridges for peace, harmony and joy among all the denominations.

From Busyness to Intimacy

By Suba, FSP

On every February 2nd, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. The same day also observes the World Day of Consecrated Life. On this special occasion, primarily we are called to celebrate our vocation, while we delve deeper into its essence in our personal, community and apostolic life. It's a day for reflection, to renew, revisit and re-launch our commitment, and for re-igniting the fire of our initial call.

Our consecrated life is a gift as well as a loving mandate from Jesus our Master - the unique sharing in the life and mission of Christ Jesus. It is a call to embrace a radical discipleship, to lead a life enveloped by poverty, chastity and obedience. These vows, far from being constraints, are pathways to true freedom – freedom from the enslavement of possessions, freedom to love unconditionally and freedom to surrender to God's will, as Jesus himself did in the garden of Gethsemane.

The Enduring Gift of Waiting

Reflecting on the Gospel passage of this feast day Pope Francis said, "Simeon and Anna, those venerable figures of expectant faith, remind us of the profound importance of 'waiting for God' in the consecrated life. As Religious, we are called to a life of profound intimacy with the Lord, a life rooted in deep communion with him. This communion, however, requires a patient and attentive waiting – a willingness to be still, to listen and to allow God to work within us in his own time and manner."

Yet, the demands of ministry, the pressures of community life, and the allure of a fast-paced world can easily distract us from this essential practice. We may find ourselves caught up in a whirlwind of activity, neglecting our interior life and losing the capacity for quiet contemplation. This can lead to spiritual aridity, a sense of emptiness and a growing distance from the Lord.

Holy Father Francis articulates, "We must admit that at times we have lost the ability to wait." This is due to several obstacles, of which the Pope highlights two of the following:

1.Neglect of Interior Life: "This is what happens when weariness prevails over amazement, when habit takes the place of enthusiasm, when we lose perseverance on the spiritual journey, when negative experiences, conflicts or seemingly delayed fruits turn us into bitter and embittered people. It is not good to ruminate on bitterness, because in a religious family, as in any community and family, bitter and "sour-faced" people are deflating, people who seem to have vinegar in their hearts."

2.Adaptation to Worldly Lifestyles: "Ours is a world that often runs at great speed, that exalts 'everything and now' that is consumed in activism and seeks to exorcise life's fears and anxieties in the pagan temples of consumerism or in entertainment at all costs." We may find ourselves succumbing to the pressure to be constantly productive, to measure our worth by external achievements, and to prioritize busyness over genuine encounter with the Lord.

How then can we cultivate the spirit of waiting within our consecrated lives?

·Prioritize Interior Life: Make time for daily prayer, for extended periods of adoration, for spiritual reading and reflection. Cultivate a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord through the sacraments, especially through the Eucharist.

·Resist the Urge for Constant Activity: Create space for silence and solitude in our daily schedules. Learn to say "no" to demands that drain our spiritual energy. Cultivate a healthy detachment from the world's frantic pace and embrace a rhythm of life that allows for contemplation and encounter with the Lord.

·Embrace the Passivity of the Spirit: True waiting requires a willingness to surrender our own plans and desires to the Lord's will. It involves a deep trust that God is at work within us, even when we do not fully understand his ways.

World Day of Consecrated Life is a time for profound reflection and renewed commitment. Let us strive to overcome the obstacles that hinder our ability to wait for God. By prioritizing our interior lives, resisting the allure of the world, and embracing the passivity of the Spirit, we can deepen our intimacy with the Lord and fulfil the unique mission to which we are called.

Bible Sunday Celebration at St. Ignatius' Church, Kidderpore

By Joanne D'Souza

St. Ignatius' Church Kidderpore had celebrated in a befitting manner, the Sunday of the Word of God, on 25th and 26th January 2025. From Saturday Evening right through Sunday, there was a sense of celebration and devotion as the Parish community meaningfully venerated and rightfully honoured the Holy Bible at all the Masses.

Before each Mass, the Parishioners gathered outside the Church and began the celebrations with the Jubilee Hymn, then all attentively listened to the Bible Reading specially selected for the occasion, on the importance of Scripture in our lives, followed by the Jubilee Prayer. Thereafter, the Main Celebrant at the various Masses carried the Bible in stately Procession to the Church and placed it on the side Altar, beautifully designed for the occasion. The Bible Altar was then incensed as a mark of reverence and sanctification. It was touching to see the Holy Bible, hold the seat of distinction and the same should be rightfully emulated in every Catholic house by ensuring that the Bible is suitably kept with great esteem and pride.

At all the Masses, the Priests highlighted the importance of the Bible and adapting and adhering to the Word of God in our daily lives. The Parish Priest, Fr. Anthony Patrick Paul in his Homily explained how as humans we pay heed and obey the word of other people, then how much greater should be one's obedience to the Word of God. He also pointed out the irony that, how can we as Catholics, claim to know our Creator when we do not know His Word? He aptly depicted the importance of knowing the Bible and urged all to ensure that in this lifetime all Catholics should endeavour to read the entire Bible at least once, which left all present with much to introspect and act on.

On the occasion of Republic Day the National Flag was also hoisted at the 6 am Mass which further strengthened the feeling of patriotism in the hearts and minds of those present and also declared their love to the Motherland.

The Bible Sunday celebrations, at the start of the Jubilee Year helped usher in a renewed commitment to ensure that regular Reading of the Holy Bible becomes a constant part of a dedicated Catholic life. The joyful celebration of the Eucharist on this day and the focus on the Holy Bible rekindled the flame of hope amongst the faithful.

In Series: Part -18

A Brief History of Church in Bengal

By Francis Sunil Rosario

(Continued….)

Protestant Church and Bengal

Keshub's preaching influenced his relative Pratap Chandra Majumdar (1840 – 1905), who, in his book Oriental Christ, tried interpreting Christ as the most perfect manifestation of "the eternal reason", the basic principle of unity present in all religions. Brahmabandhab Upadhayay (1861 – 1907), during the last decade of the 19th cent., tried to interpret Christianity in the light of Vedantic knowledge through his journal Sophia

and other writings. He also published Sandhya, a Bengali periodical. He was baptized as a Catholic and is counted as one of the great luminaries of Bengal Renaissance Period.

Ram Mohan and other like-minded souls who in the 19th century sought for an explanation of Christianity in Indian terms belong to the category of those whom the Danish scholar Kaj Baago referred to in the title of one of his books as Precursors of Indigenous Christianity. They not only helped to provide Indian Christianity with a tradition of its own but also prevented it from being cut off from the mainstream of national life.

Some Protestant Missionaries also took active part in certain movements that was in keeping with local needs and aspirations. The services rendered by Rev. James Long in the fight against the indigo planters on behalf of the riots of Bengal during the years 1861 – 1862 and the efforts he put in for the spread of education. Due to his deep commitment and interest in people's movements, a Street in Calcutta has been named after him by the Government of West Bengal.

Therefore, an indigenous Church movement began in the 19th century by various Bengali believers and who could interpret Bible and contextualize the teachings of Christ. In the early stages Christianity was assumed to be basically hostile to Bengali life, and the response of the common people to the message of Christ was conditioned by an apprehension of losing Bengali identity. Though the indigenous Christian Movement in Bengal was the endeavour of the native Christians to be identified as Bengali Christians and recognised as an integral part of the Society and the Church, down the line this was only tolerated in some measure, not fully accepted by the Church Hierarchy both by the Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic.

Keeping this vision of the Church in Bengal, Rev. James Long dedicated his life in serving the suffering millions in Bengal and made the people realise that Christianity is a religion of love. On the contrary, Alexander Duff imposed Anglo culture through English education to impede the process of Inculturation at a larger scale. Lord Macaulay's policy of education gave way to the Missionaries to follow the western pattern in administration and style of living.

The establishment of the Hindu College in 1817 was a very important landmark. It was the result of a great collective effort by a number of leaders of the then Calcutta Society along with some officials, who came together with support from the authorities. Both Raja Rammohan Roy and David Hare were associated with the founding of the College. Later on, this college was named as Presidency College in 1855. The college played a significant role in shaping the future of Modern Bengal.

A number of Englishmen who served in India became conscious of India's ancient history and civilization and felt that nothing should be done to uproot the people from their own history and traditions. The setting up of the Calcutta Madrasa by Warren Hastings in 1871 and the Sanskrit College at Benaras by Duncan were the examples of this trend of thought.

All these movements indicate that Bengal had a strong desire to work for Inculturation and build the Church in Bengal according to Bengali Culture and heritage. Although, over 100 years now that this process of Inculturation in Bengal began, still the Church in Bengal is seen by other Religions as something 'foreign'.

In 1887, Kalicharan Banerjea and Joy Govinda Shome formed the Calcutta Christo Samaj. This strand of indigenous movement was in the urban areas, and the main protagonists were the products of the 19th century awakening of Bengal. Their intellectual mentors were Rammohan roy,Derozio, keshub Chandra Sen, who influenced by the Unitarian and other liberal movements from the West and by the Vaishnava Bhakti tradition of Bengal. The 19th century radical converts from Hinduism to Christianity in Bengal were, K.M. Banerjea, LalbehariDey, Kalicharan Banerjea and Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya.

Perspective

Ecumenism and its Challenges Today - 2

Francis Sunil Rosario

The Holy See has established the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity for dialogue with various churches and ecclesial communities to bring about unity among all Christians.

The fundamental mission of the Church is to evangelize, ""Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation," (Mk 16:15). Since Vatican II, the Church has been making all efforts to reinvent the spirit of this message and striving hard to promote the value of unity among all Christians. This unity is imperative for the fruitful mission.

The Pontifical Council has made great strides in narrowing down the hostility and suspicion that existed among the Christians of various denominations. Innumerable Dialogues and agreed Statements have been successful in removing the barriers that once separated churches from each other. Official level visits and meetings between the heads of churches have become the order of the day.

The vision and mission statement of the Commission for Ecumenism are : Vision: "Realization of God's kingdom through the reconciled communion of all churches and ecclesial communities" and the Mission is "to bring about communion through prayer, reconciliation, ecumenical dialogue and common action by promoting better understanding and collaboration with all churches and ecclesial communities in a spirit of openness and love". (Commission for Ecumenism, CCBI)

Trends in the early stages of Ecumenical Movements in India

According to Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Anthony Thumma, Executive Secretary, CBCI Commission for Dialogue and ecumenism, in one of his most recent deliberations, he wrote on the trends in the early stages of ecumenical movements in India. Similar trends were noticed, both at the Asian and Global level.

1.The first trend sprang up from the cooperation among missionaries of various Churches and mission societies that was happening throughout the history of Christianity. However, the Indian ecumenical movement took shape when the diverse mission societies / associations and Churches came together to form associations and unions, and organised National Missionary Conferences and Decennial Missionary Conferences to promote cooperation among them and to foster Christian unity.

In India, many local and national missionary conferences took place after the World Missionary Conference at Edinburg in 1910, leading to the formation of the National Missionary Council of India affiliated to the International Missionary Council.

2.The second trend is related to the stirrings of the struggle for Independence of India. The national spirit gave rise to the formation of ecumenical movement bringing together Indian Christians and indigenous Churches. For this, in 1871 the Western India Native Christian Alliance was founded at Bombay (Mumbai), and in 1886 the Native Church of India was formed at Madras (Chennai). In Bengal, a group of Christians formed the Christo Samaj in 1887. Its purpose was to propagate Christian truth and promote Christian unity towards the formation of a national Church.

The National Missionary Society of India (NMSI), an ecumenical organization, was established in Serampore in 1905 which convened a national conference under the banner of All India Conference of Indian Christians (AICIC) in 1914 bringing together the regional Indian Christian Associations that were existing in several parts of India.

3.The third trend from which the ecumenical movement emerged in India as well as at the global level was the formation of youth movements. Prominent among them are the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) and the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI) which started in 1912. The youth movements were fertile fields not only for ecumenical fellowship, they also provided future missionaries and leaders of ecumenical movement.

In India, we have a long history of ecumenical cooperation occurring through national and international organisations like the YMCA, YWCA, SCMI, the Bible Society of India (BSI) founded in 1946, Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), India Sunday School Union (ISSU), All India Sunday School Association (AISSA), Ecumenical Christian Centre (ECC), Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS), Christian Literature Society (CLS), India Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (ISPCK), Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI), Christian Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), Ecumenical Loan Fund (ECLOF), Henry Martin Institute(HMI), and All India Association for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE).

Catholic Participation

After the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church launched its ecumenical work officially and formally in India when the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) established in 1967 what is now termed as the CBCI Office for Dialogue, (CBCI OD&DE) and Desk for Ecumenism, (CCBI)

From 1970 to 1975 it fostered the ecumenical relations with other Churches through the All India Ecumenical Co-ordinating Body. Through the efforts of its regional and diocesan commissions ecumenicalrelationship has been growing in India.

These commissions for ecumenism through their collaboration with various Churches and NCCI commissions have brought about mutual understanding by dispelling prejudices and antipathy that was prevalent earlier. The Offices / Commissions of CBCI and NCCI jointly promote the celebration of the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Thoughts for India's Republic Day

By Myron J Pereira

There are two important national holidays in our country – Independence Day on Aug. 15, when after a bitter struggle of six decades we wrested political freedom from British rule in 1947... and Republic Day on Jan. 26, when we constituted ourselves into a "sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic" in 1950. Of these two dates, no doubt at all that it is the second date which is the more important.

It came at the end of two years of arguments, debates and discussions which concluded on Nov. 26, 1949, giving us the "Constitution of India," the longest and most thorough political foundational document in the world.

Today, it is this Constitution that is under threat, for this glorious republic of ours has been reduced to a shell of pious intentions and legal shibboleths. In the words of numerous political and legal luminaries, "We have failed the ideals of the Constitution."

Ignorance of our Constitution

How is this so? Primarily, through ignorance. Most of us have never read a page of the Constitution, and so when we argue over a technical point, it is usually from hearsay.

Being an unfamiliar text, the Constitution easily becomes the victim of subjective interpretations.

The guardians of constitutional practice are (in ascending order) the election commissioners, the media, the courts, the parliament and the executive. In recent years, we have seen just how a self-centered leader can pulverize parliament, neutralize the judiciary, and stifle the media.

As Stalin used to say, "It's not important who votes. What is important is who counts the votes." When this happens, elections do indeed take place, but they are only notional exercises, of no real value. In other words, the nation is an electoral democracy, not a substantive democracy.

But it's not just ignorance. It's also a devious conspiracy, the second reason.

Rejection of Constitutional values

Let's face it. India, that is Bharat, is a feudal country, shackled to mores and traditions which ensured that the vast numbers of its people forever remained oppressed and subservient to its minuscule ruling classes.

The two historical influences on the Constitution were the American War of Independence (1775-1783) which gave us the ideas of 'equality of opportunity' and federalism; and the French Revolution, with its cry of "liberty, equality, fraternity" (1789), which became the cornerstones of our Constitution.

But the present government in India has always been uncomfortable with our Constitution, believing it to be influenced by foreign sources, and not indigenous enough.

It would like us to go back to the Manusmriti, that compendium of religious and casteist texts which undergirded Hindu society, and was responsible for its backwardness for centuries.

The caste system institutionalized de facto slavery for the majority of our people, many of whom have not, after generations, recovered from its degrading depravity.

Hindu tradition did this by rejecting and deprecating the very idea of equality, founded as it was on a religiously sanctified idea of inequality, which it deemed necessary for social stability.

As to fraternity (or better, "community") among people as people, as opposed to those within the caste group, it was considered far too scandalous a proposition even to be considered. Look at the number of "honour killings," and the suppression of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, if there be any doubt at all.

The tasks ahead

Independence Day remembers the past, our years of slavery to British rule, and how colonialism impoverished us. Its hero is Mahatma Gandhi (among others), and how he taught us to be self-reliant and proud of ourselves. It was Gandhi and his generation who gave us our political liberty.

It was Nehru and his generation that welded this diverse collection of feudal kingdoms, native states and financial fiefs into a modern nation. It was during his time and under his influence that Indians began to see themselves as one community, and the values of modernity reached out to every village in the hinterland. We call this "community" or fraternity.

In many ways, the technological revolution of affordable transport and cheap telecommunications has assisted the migration of people across our land and the globe.

The last constitutional value is also the hardest to come by. It is equality, and Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution recognized this. Ambedkar was a Dalit or former untouchable and a reformer who brought millions of Dalits out of the oppression of traditional Hinduism into the social egalitarianism of Buddhism.

There are of course various kinds of inequality, though economic inequality (poverty) underlies them all. Social inequality is related to the class divide in society, and gender inequality is how women always get a worse deal when compared to men. Racial inequality is a relic of colonial practice and has a political slant.

Is inequality growing in the world? Yes, it is. The rise of Donald Trump/ Elon Musk in the USA, and the continuance of some of our leaders in this country, are constant reminders of how the world is skewed in this regard.

Is there no hope then? I return to Ambedkar and one of his constant sayings: "Educate, organize, agitate." A simple and effective formula that organizes the mind and the will for effective action.

It worked for him then, and raised a Dalit boy, scorned by his peers, to become the saviour of his people and the architect of his country's Constitution. It can, and it will work for us today.

Jubilee Conference

Prophetesses of hope': Dedication of religious sisters and power of communication

By Salvatore Cernuzio

Religious sisters from around the world share their projects, missions, experiences, and witness at the Global Jubilee Conference with Religious Sisters, organized by the Dicastery for Communication.

The little girl in South America with her legs cut off by a train on its way through Mexico, in front of her mother. Another 8-year-old girl in the Philippines locked in the dark in a room with her aunt selling her little body online. The woman, or rather, the many women impregnated by their tormentors in Uganda, rejected by their families and trained to make weapons. The refugees, the homeless, the teenage victims of violence, the poor families, the malnourished children without education or medical care.

The splendour of the 16th-century frescoes in the Sistine Hall was not enough to soften the impact of the stories and testimonies reported by nuns from all over the world during the Global Jubilee Conference with women religious held Thursday, 23 January, in the Vatican Apostolic Library.

Global Jubilee Conference with Religious Sisters

Communication as a gift

The Conference, promoted by the Dicastery for Communication with the support of the Hilton Foundation (together we collaborate on the Pentecost Project) in the context of the Jubilee dedicated to communicators, was intended to be a platform and a showcase for the experiences, works, and missions of women religious from around the world, and to show how various forms of media – both old and new – are fundamental tools for these experiences, works and missions.

Thanks to social media, radios, websites or simply listening, the little South American girl was taken to a migrant reception centre, then to Tennessee, and where she lost her limbs, she regained her smile; the little Filipino girl was saved from the horrors of the web; the Ugandan women learnt to sew bags and clothes, providing for their personal needs but also for those of the village that had rejected them.

All this was thanks to communication, understood in the etymological sense: "communication as a reciprocal gift of self," as Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, explained in his opening greeting.

Examples of'female genius'

Fifteen speakers (with a large female presence, 12 out of 15) gave engaging testimonies from disaster-stricken areas of Africa, Europe, or South East Asia during the event, which gave the appearance of a cross between a press conference, a training course, and a round table.

Religious sisters were described as 'prophetesses of hope... with their hands in the dough,' strong, resilient, examples of 'tenderness', yes, but living their vocation by sharing meals and lodgings with the poor they assist, putting themselves in front of the camera to denounce, in short

films, the tragedies of their own village; by teaching illiterate women to speak on the radio or to knock on the doors of the rich to demand aid for children at risk of hunger.

The 'feminine genius' proclaimed by the last three Popes, in short, was seen in all its variety in the speeches of the conference participants, who also had the opportunity to visit the headquarters of Vatican News, as well as the Vatican Radio Museum and St Peter's Basilica.

The creativity of the nuns

The Conference opened with greetings by the Prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, BAV), Salesian Father Mauro Mantovano; and a prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary led by Monsignor Lucio Ruiz, Secretary of the Dicastery for Communication.

Addressing the sisters, Msgr. Ruiz said, "We need your wisdom, your dynamism, your creativity, your love."

In his remarks, Dr. Ruffini also spoke of love, recalling how it was "the first source of communication" of the early Christians, who "were recognised by the way they loved each other."

Communication "transforms relationships into connections," the Prefectcontinued, adding that today, in this "change of era," we must "live communion."

"We live in a fast-paced time, we cannot stop it, but we can take time for reflection to restore communication to its deepest meaning," he said. "We need the creative love of the sisters."

The legacy of the Hilton Foundation

That need corresponds in large part with the mandate given by Conrad Hilton to the Foundation that bears his name. In his will, his granddaughter Linda recalled, Hilton expressed a clear intention to direct "the largest portion" of the funds "for the benefit of nuns around the world."

"Remaining faithful to this service since '54," Linda Hilton, over the years 614 million ṣUSṭ dollars has been given to nuns, "who defend communities, who promote peace and justice, especially if they have access to education or have a voice at the decision-making table." Mothers and sisters who educate children, care for those in need, stand by those who are victims of oppression.

Standing with migrants at the US-Mexico border

Sister Norma Pimentel, the first speaker at the event, is a prime example. An "angel" of migrants crossing the Rio Grande and an influential figure in the US Church, she has been assisting those who venture on the voyages of hope from Mexico to the USA for years.

Now, with the new US government, that faces "a series of new challenges": "With prayers and support we will try to do our utmost to defend the marginalised and be present," Sister Norma said." She then recounted her experiences with children and families from Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia, Venezuela, and Haiti, as well as Ukraine, Russia, and China, all "in terrible conditions."

At one time, Sister Norma could not bring these experiences to the microphones and cameras. "They tried to pull me into the world of politics... My response was always to return to the message of the Gospel." Then the nun realised that communication could help her work.

She gave the example of the 6-year-old South American girl who was crossing Mexico with her family; in an attempt to board "The Beast," the large goods train that never stops, she fell and the vehicle severed her legs. "The mother had stayed behind, she saw the whole scene, she picked up her daughter's legs from the tracks."

The child was taken to hospital and then to Sister Norma's centre: "She survived, full of life, with no legs but a smile on her face because she was safe." The family wanted to move to Tennessee; Sr.Pimentel posted a photograph on Facebook asking for help to buy tickets: $1500 was requested, more than $8,000 received: "And we are still getting funds!" Sr. Pimentel said, describing it as a response after a communication.

"Sewing hope" of women victims of violence in Uganda

A round of applause greeted Sr. Pimentel's speech, which continued for Sr. Rosemary Nirumbe, a Ugandan nun described by Time as one of the 100 most influential people in the world for her work on behalf of victims of abuse and torture.

These included women kidnapped by the so-called "Lord's Resistance Army" in

Uganda, and "trained to kill," a danger to society, rejected by families and relatives because they were carrying the kidnappers' children. "I did not know what to do with them... They were traumatised. I used the only FM radio station to send a message to the women: You can come to the Santa Monica centre in your condition! If you are pregnant come as you are, if you are victims of sexual violence come! It was risky, the rebels were also listening, but I took the risk."

And so many women came to the Santa Monica Centre with their children. Sister Rosemary first taught the girls "to receive love," then started a tailoring project to sew clothes and bags (the outfit she wore to the event came out of the project) and to "sew hope." "I decided to communicate to these young girls that their future can be fixed, mended," she said. "They had been forced to make automatic weapons, so I put them in front of automatic sewing machines."

The nun's work has spread to villages, towns, and whole regions. In South Sudan, a nutrition programme was started for 450 displaced children. "We were able to feed everyone for the first time." This came after Sister Rosemary had flown all the way to the USA to tell a benefactor: "If we don't feed these children at least three times a week they will die quickly."

"Now we feed these children every day, a peace school was started to teach reading and writing, we offer health care, we even smuggle medicine from Uganda – but don't tell anyone."

Fighting human trafficking

Filipino Sister Abby Avelino, a delegate of the anti-trafficking organisation Talitha Kum, spoke with equal vigour. Sister Abby is dedicated to women and men deceived and exploited by traffickers – including, sometimes, even their own relatives.

Ruined lives, like that of the girl thrown into a car as soon as she arrived at the airport, forced to work in a nightclub for 20 hours. Once she was identified, Talitha Kum was able to rescue her, Sr Abby recounted.

She then denounced the phenomenon that most concerns the 5,000 members of Talitha Kum: exploitation in the digital world. Children are the first victims, she said, noting that the organisation has received almost eight million complaints of online exploitation between 2019 and 2022. Overall numbers increased with the Covid pandemic.

To combat this new challenge, we need joint work bynetworks, agencies, NGOs, public safety.Anonymity and the speed of the web allow traffickers to remain untraced. And dating apps and social networks offer new platforms for recruiting for forced labour, scams, and paedophilia.Sr Abby told the story of an eight-year-old girl who was exploited by her aunt. "She was exploited, her body sold online."

Classifieds

"Be thankful for what you have, you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never have enough."
- OPRAH-WINFREY

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This breathtaking aerial view of St. Xavier's College (established 1850) was taken from the terrace of the city's tallest building, No. 42.(Photo Credit: Fr. Felix Raj,SJ)

Edited, Printed and Published by B. L. Mathai, on behalf of Associates Catholic Newspaper, WB, from 10, Govt. Place East, Kolkata - 700 069 and printed by L. S. Publications Pvt. Ltd.